

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

VA TRANSPARENCY & TRUST ACT OF 2021

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Veterans' Affairs be discharged from further consideration of H.R. 2911 and that the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the bill by title.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 2911) to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to submit to Congress a plan for obligating and expending Coronavirus pandemic funding made available to the Department of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes.

There being no objection, the committee was discharged and the Senate proceeded to consider the bill.

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the bill be considered read a third time and passed, and that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The bill (H.R. 2911) was ordered to a third reading, was read the third time, and passed.

ROBERT S. POYDASHEFF VA CLINIC

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Veterans' Affairs be discharged from further consideration of H.R. 3475, and the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the bill by title.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 3475) to name the Department of Veterans Affairs community-based outpatient clinic in Columbus, Georgia, as the "Robert S. Poydasheff VA Clinic".

There being no objection, the committee was discharged and the Senate proceeded to consider the bill.

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the bill be considered read a third time and passed, and that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The bill (H.R. 3475) was ordered to a third reading, was read the third time, and passed.

LIEUTENANT COLONEL JOHN W. MOSLEY VA CLINIC

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Veterans' Affairs be discharged from further consideration of H.R. 4172, and the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the bill by title.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 4172) to name the Department of Veterans Affairs community-based outpatient clinic in Aurora, Colorado, as the "Lieutenant Colonel John W. Mosley VA Clinic".

There being no objection, the committee was discharged and the Senate proceeded to consider the bill.

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the bill be considered read a third time and passed, and that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The bill (H.R. 4172) was ordered to a third reading, was read the third time, and passed.

SECURE EQUIPMENT ACT OF 2021

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, finally, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of H.R. 3919, which was received from the House and is at the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the bill by title.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 3919) to ensure that the Federal Communications Commission prohibits authorization of radio frequency devices that pose a national security risk.

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the bill.

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent the bill be considered read three times and passed, and the motion to be reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table with no intervening action or debate.

The bill (H.R. 3919) was ordered to a third reading, was read the third time, and passed.

Mr. SCHUMER. I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alaska.

TRIBUTE TO JIM SCHMIDT

Mr. SULLIVAN. Mr. President, it is Thursday afternoon, and it is one of my favorite times in the Senate because it is the time I have the opportunity to come down on the Senate floor to talk about an Alaskan who is making a difference in their community or the State or maybe the country, you know, sometimes maybe the world. And I think we have one today. This is an individual we call our Alaskan of the Week.

I really enjoy doing this. It is just really a good opportunity to recognize people who often don't get a lot of recognition.

You know, Alaska is known throughout the world for many things: our physical beauty, the size of our State, giant mountains, great fishing, great place to take a vacation. By the way, if you are watching at home, come on up to Alaska. We would love to have you—summer, winter, it doesn't matter.

All of these things, of course, about the State are true, but there are so

many other great things about our State. The No. 1 thing is our people: strong, resilient, kind, tough American citizens—great people.

Nowhere is this spirit of the people of Alaska and their patriotism more apparent than in our veterans across the State.

In Alaska, we have the highest number of veterans per capita of any State in America, veterans and their families everywhere. Everyday heroes, I like to call them.

It is amazing. In every city, village, community—it doesn't matter how big, how small—you will find proud American veterans, many of them working tirelessly together to make sure they help other veterans get the support that they have earned, the care that they have earned, and to support their families.

Today, as our Veterans Day approaches, I want to highlight one of these heroes, one of these Alaska veterans whose service is so inspiring that for those who are watching, I think you are going to have a hard time actually believing it is true. This person, our Alaskan of the Week, is 94-year-old Jim Schmidt—husband, grandfather, great-grandfather, combat veteran, Alaskan, American hero.

Let me tell you about this incredible, remarkable story, for which somebody should buy the movie rights right now.

While you are watching, you better go buy the movie rights of Mr. Schmidt.

Jim was 14 years old in 1942. Of course, the United States had already entered and was fighting in World War II. It wasn't going well in 1942, by the way. He was living with his parents in the San Francisco Bay area. Jim slipped out one day to see a movie. It was called the "Parachute Battalion." That was the name of the movie, starring the beautiful Nancy Kelly. It was then, watching this movie, right then and there, he said: I am going to enlist. I am going to enlist in the Airborne.

Now, he was a big guy, a big young man—actually, he was a young kid—200 pounds, 6 feet tall. A big kid, as I mentioned, but just think, he was 14 years old. He went to the recruiter and said he was 18. He looked it.

The Army didn't ask for IDs back then, so off he went, assigned to the 504th Infantry Regiment of the world-famous 82nd Airborne at the tender age of 14.

His father was also in the Army, stationed at Fort Campbell, KY. And when there was a little confusion about where Jim was, when he didn't come home for days and weeks, his mother assumed he had gone to stay with his dad. His dad assumed he was still with his mother. Wires got crossed, and later his mom got a letter from Corporal Schmidt, CPL Jim Schmidt, who was now 15. He wrote:

From somewhere in North Africa.

Actually, it was near Tunis, which had just fallen to the British and General Patton, the American general, in

the battle against the Germans in North Africa.

He wrote his mom:

How are you [mom] and the girls?

He was referring to his sisters. He talked about the hot weather. He sent her \$30.

Fast forward a few months later. It is now July 9, 1943. Jim is jumping out of an airplane onto the island of Sicily, a combat jump. In Sicily, it was the largest airborne offensive in U.S. history—a military airborne operation providing support for what was called Operation Husky, more than 170,000 Allied troops that would descend onto the island, drive the Axis powers—mostly the Germans—from the island and open up the Mediterranean front of the European theater. Combat operations, airborne operations, and Jim is 15.

Now, mistakes were made in this very big operation. Communications were sporadic. Friendly fire happened, no doubt killing American servicemembers—ferocious combat.

Some of these brave paratroopers—many were killed, many missed the landing spot—were scattered all over the island.

When Corporal Schmidt, 15 years old, landed, he came under attack by the Germans. He lost one of his best friends and mentors, fighting together in a foxhole, hand-to-hand fighting. He engaged in combat, killing the enemy. He remembers one young German, a messenger about his age. He actually found the boy's wallet because he wanted to get in touch with his family after the war to tell them how brave the young German soldier was—tough stuff.

During the battle, he was wounded, but he continued to fight. But because he was wounded, a telegraph was sent home by the Army to his mom. And at that point, he and his battalion, which was part of the 504th Infantry Regiment, Airborne Regiment in Salerno, Italy, were fighting to hold off a major German counterattack.

You can imagine Jim's mother was beside herself. Her 15-year-old son was wounded in combat in Italy. So guess what she did. You can tell what kind of stock Jim comes from. His mom wrote the President of the United States directly, President Roosevelt.

She said to the President she was glad to have her husband serve in the Army, but it was a bit much that her 15-year-old son was fighting in Europe and "lying wounded and unattended in a Sicily field."

That is Jim's mom to President Roosevelt.

Remarkably, she received a response. The letter has since been lost, but those who saw it said that President Roosevelt himself wrote Jim's mom and said: I am sorry the military didn't know that Jim was only 15—14 when he joined—and that he would make sure he was located as soon as possible and sent back to the United States. Sounds a little bit like "Saving Private Ryan," the movie.

So that happened. Shortly before he turned 16, Corporal Schmidt was put on

a ship, pretty much at the direction of the President of the United States, and sent back to the United States.

Jim later recalled that when his mom saw him, of course, she was happy, but she "chewed me out. What would any other mother say to their son" for enlisting at the age of 14 and not telling the mom?

A local newspaper heard about Jim and wrote a story. Here is what it said:

Fifteen year old [then] Pfc James O. Schmidt . . . left his desk in the Eighth Grade at Ross Grammar School . . . to enter the Army, [he] has retired from active duty [at the age of 15] after seeing action with the [Airborne unit and] Paratroopers in [North] Africa and being wounded in the Battle of Sicily.

He was 15.

The newspaper wrote about how Jim had received an invitation to his own grammar school graduation when he was in Sicily.

He wrote back to his grammar school and said:

It will be impossible [for me to attend eighth grade graduation] as I am rather busy with the job of hunting Germans and Italians.

This alone makes a great story. Grade school graduation was missed because he was fighting in Europe and North Africa and Italy. But there is more to this story.

Shortly after being home, you guessed it, Jim walked into a Navy recruiting office. Again, nobody in the Navy asked how old he was.

The recruiter said:

Congratulations. You're now in the U.S. Navy.

So off to boot camp he went at the age of 16, already a veteran, a serious combat veteran—16 years old, unstoppable, American patriot, wanting to fight for his country in World War II.

Six months later, Jim is on a Navy destroyer deployed. But his age finally caught up with him. The Navy found out, figured out he was 16, and sent him back home. Here is an Airborne combat veteran of World War II, he is 16, and he has already been kicked out of the Army and the Navy because he is too young.

Obviously, this young man was hell-bent on serving his country so he found another organization where age didn't matter. He joined the Merchant Marines, where he remained for the remainder of World War II, serving on an ammo resupply ship in the Atlantic, participating in the war until the war was won and wound down.

So the war is over. He is a little older. What do you think he does? Eight months after he turned 18, he re-enlisted in the U.S. Army.

Now, the Army was gracious and recognized: Hey, we got a combat vet. Yeah, he was only 14. So they brought him in as a sergeant, a D5. And guess what. By luck, he was assigned to occupation duty in Germany with the 508th Infantry Airborne Regiment that he had fought with in North Africa and Sicily.

So he did that duty; then he went to Japan for occupation duty. And then what happened in 1950? The Korean war breaks out. So he is sent to Korea.

As if his service in World War II wasn't enough, this remarkable story of James Schmidt continues.

He went alongside the U.S. Marines to fight in one of the most brutal, ferocious battles of the 20th century—the Battle of the Chosin Reservoir. It was 30 below zero, 120 communists, People's Liberation Chinese soldiers, surrounding 20,000 marines and the Army, soldiers and marines.

It was incredible, horrible odds. And yet the Marines and the Army persevered, despite brutal combat situations, relentless Chinese communist troops attacking, attacking, attacking.

He was wounded, broke his shoulder again, led his men in many counterattacks, and got the rest of his men out of the Chosin Reservoir.

So, Mr. President, you are seeing that this is remarkable, but we are not done.

He survived Chosin Reservoir. He survived the rest of the Korean war. He survived World War II.

Fast-forward another decade, another American conflict in Southeast Asia, and now Jim Schmidt is a master sergeant, Special Forces, in Laos, charged with raising local forces to fight the communist Lao guerillas.

Now he has been in combat in three wars, presented his third award, a Combat Infantry Badge, for his actions in Laos. And, then, it was on to Vietnam, where Jim was the sergeant major in charge of the 7th Special Forces A-Teams and then the 5th Special Forces Group, one of the most famous units of all of the Vietnam war—5th Special Forces, an airborne unit—until he returned to Fort Bragg in 1965.

So here is what he has done so far for his country: two Silver Stars for heroism, three Bronze Stars for heroism, two Purple Hearts.

He wanted back in the action, but the Army said: Nope. You are going to go into recruiting.

According to one of his daughters, he was never much of a handshaker and did not like the idea of riding a desk. So, despite the heroism, despite the service, he opted to retire from the military, and then he joined Air America, which was doing covert operations in Vietnam, until 1967, when he finally decided to settle down with his wife Peggy and focus on another critically important task for our country: raising three strong, wonderful, beautiful daughters.

Mr. President, that is something I can certainly relate to.

Now, I want to say that this is an amazing story. Unfortunately, Jim was not always treated like the hero he was. During his Vietnam service, his father died—the World War II veteran I mentioned earlier—and so he rushed home through the San Francisco airport to attend his father's funeral. And, unfortunately, he was in uniform

and, unfortunately, was jeered and booed by many in the airport.

Can you imagine that, America? Think about that. What a shameful period for our Nation that so many failed to honor obvious American heroes like Jim. But, fortunately, that didn't last long for our country. But we should never forget that.

But I am digressing because he wasn't just an American hero in uniform but, according to his daughters, a great father. He was engaged in their activities—his three daughters—taught them to be determined, independent, hard-working young women where the sky was the limit. He didn't let them sleep in. That was the military dad, I am sure.

He and his wife Peggy, a registered nurse, came to Alaska in 1993 to be close to one of their daughters, who is now a renowned chef—actually, one of the best chefs in all of Alaska, and a lodge owner in Alaska, Kirsten Dixon. His other daughter Katherine is now a successful real estate broker, and his other daughter Jami lives in the DC area, who is also working in the intelligence field, kind of like her old man did. What a great legacy for Jim and Peggy and the whole family.

So Jim loves Alaska, the freedom in Alaska, the frontier spirit, the fact that he is in a State with more veterans per capita than any State. And he is certainly one of the great ones that we have in our State.

At 94 years old, he is surrounded by his children, his grandchildren, his great-grandchildren. According to his family, like most heroes in our country, he doesn't talk much about the war—still really doesn't—and his full story was only fully revealed when one of his grandchildren, Henry, began to get interested and did a podcast about his grandfather and shared it on social media—his amazing grandfather. Since then, the letters have flooded in, people wanting to know about this incredible American hero who missed his grade school graduation because he was doing airborne operations in Sicily.

Just the other night he was on a Zoom with a 15-year-old because he always has time for veterans, and he gives advice to young people who are interested in serving in the military and hearing his story and getting advice. Jim says that he doesn't believe the military is for everybody, but if you have the calling, then you should follow the calling, even if you are young—but, I would caution, not 14. But Jim should know.

Mr. President, this is a remarkable American story, one for the history books, and it is one of the reasons, many reasons, that so many people in my State have served and sacrificed for their country—everyday heroes we call them—in Alaska. There are heroes all around us, and certainly Jim is one of the most important, one of the most prominent, one of the most humble. We are proud to have him in our State.

We thank him and his wife Peggy and his wonderful three daughters and

their whole family for sharing Jim with us, and we want to thank Jim for his incredible tenacity, patriotism, remarkable service, and example.

And, Jim, we want to thank you once again for being our Alaskan of the Week. Happy Veterans Day to you and all the veterans back home in Alaska.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Ohio.

Mr. PORTMAN. Mr. President, well, first, I just got to hear the story of Jim Schmidt of Alaska—what an amazing American hero. I thank the Senator from Alaska, Senator SULLIVAN, for sharing that with all of us.

INFRASTRUCTURE BILL

Mr. PORTMAN. Mr. President, I am here on the floor tonight to talk about the growing epidemic of drug addiction and the issue that is occurring in my home State of Ohio and, really, all the States represented here in this Chamber and how we need to redouble our efforts.

It is a heartbreaking story because we were making so much progress prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, but, now, underneath the pandemic, we have this epidemic that is growing.

But before I get into that, I must talk first about what is going on this evening in the U.S. House of Representatives. Almost 3 months ago, at the beginning of August, we passed in this Chamber bipartisan legislation to finally address our infrastructure shortfalls in this country. Presidents of both parties had been proposing it for many years. Congress had talked about it a lot, but we had never been able to figure out a way forward.

So a group of 10 Republicans and 10 Democrats got together and said: We are going to grow this from the middle out and figure out how to address our infrastructure challenges and do so in a bipartisan way.

We did that. The President of the United States, President Biden, supported our effort, and we were able to get that legislation across the floor here in the U.S. Senate—not without some challenges and some changes and modifications. But we were able to do it because it was great for America, great for every State represented here, because it was repairing roads and bridges but also our ports, our waterways, our water infrastructure, our infrastructure that is considered digital, which would be high-speed internet, to make sure it is available to all of our citizens.

So there are a lot of things that people had talked about for a long time and said they were for, but finally we were able to actually put it into writing and get it done. And it passed this Chamber with a big vote: 69 votes. Rarely does something so significant pass this Chamber with that kind of bipartisan support.

Unfortunately, it has languished in the House of Representatives for al-

most 3 months, since early August. And the reason it has languished over there isn't because it doesn't have the votes. It is really more because people would like to use it as a hostage for something they want even more, and that is just wrong.

So, tonight, I urge my House colleagues, Democrat and Republican alike, to put aside the partisanship and focus on the substance of the bill and pass it. It has been held political hostage to something that House Democrats, particularly progressives in the House, want even more. It is not that they are opposed to infrastructure. They know this is needed. They know it is good for their constituents and it is good for our country. It is because they want even more to pass a massive, new spending bill called sometimes the Build Back Better bill, sometimes the reconciliation bill, sometimes the \$3.5 trillion tax-and-spend bill. That is totally separate from infrastructure, but that is really what they want to pass.

So they know that a lot of moderate Democrats support the infrastructure bill. They need those moderate Democrats to support the massive tax-and-spend bill. So, in effect, they have held it hostage. They have not allowed the infrastructure bill to move unless they get commitments on the bill they really want, which is the tax-and-spend bill. I think that is just wrong.

So I urge the Speaker of the House and my colleagues in the House to go ahead and vote on that legislation this evening. I know there has been back-and-forth all day about what will happen. All I can say is it is the right thing to do for our country.

When you think about it, the infrastructure bill is exactly what we need right now. Not only do we have a long-term challenge that everybody knows about and that we have been talking about for literally decades, but for the problems we face right now in our economy, it is very effective.

Inflation: Everybody is concerned about it, and they should be. The cost of gasoline at the pump is up about 42 percent this year compared to last year. It is really tough on middle-class families because, although paychecks may have gone up a little bit, inflation has gone up higher. So it is essentially a tax on so many of our working families in this country. But everything is up: food, clothing, furniture, everything.

So inflation is driven, in part, by the stimulus spending. You remember that, back in March, there was a big bill, \$1.9 trillion. And many of us said, including some Democrats and including, famously, Larry Summers, who is the former Democratic Secretary of the Treasury for President Obama and in the Clinton administration: If you do this massive amount of spending, an unprecedented amount of stimulus spending, you will drive up inflation because you are putting many more dollars into people's pockets, into the economy, at a time when the economy